

ABOVE THE FORD

By Nora Bryant

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Ludlow sat on the river bank, with the dog's head on his knee. He was very tired and very much exasperated. He had left the survey camp immediately on receiving Gretchen's letter, telling of her arrival at the De la Rio ranch and had thought to cover the hundred miles between camp and ranch easily, but Indian river had risen inexplicably and Kywak refused to swim the ford, so now, within five miles of the ranch, it looked as if he would miss seeing Gretchen after all, for she did not expect him and her visit was but a three days' affair.

Therefore Ludlow sat behind a huge rock, which sheltered him somewhat from the raw wind, and while getting his breath alternately patted the head of the panting dog and shook his fist at the distant figure of a horse calmly grazing on buffalo grass.

"Hang it!" repeated Ludlow. "Hang it! I thought Kywak had got over her foolishness about fording. Was I



LUDLOW GAVE A GREAT SPRING AND CAUGHT THE DOG'S COLLAR.

asleep or crazy that I let her jerk the bridle from my hand when I led her down to drink?"

The dog looked up sympathetically. The ninety-five miles of racing after Kywak had been nothing to his long boarhound legs, but this wild herding of a single clever Indian pony for three hours had been a little strenuous. He had done his best for his master, but when he was not allowed to catch flank or throat in powerful jaws how was he to hold a horse? Bismarck was a boarhound, not a collie.

Ludlow glowered at the cheerless heaps of rocks that guarded either bank of the river.

"It is cold enough," he said, "for the river to be frozen. Just my luck to have it twice as deep as usual! Well, Bismarck, old boy, I see nothing for it but for you and me to leave Kywak to her cussedness and swim the river. And I'll be a fine sight to Gretchen after two years! Oh, well, who knows whether she'll care or not?"

Ludlow rose and began to tramp up the river. "It is a bad idea to move away from the ford," he thought, "but I'll go up a way and see if the river isn't narrower. It's too deep now to strike quicksand."

He picked his way carefully over the rocks. Indian river was always cold and always swift, but doubly so today, after the early winter rains. The day was bleak, with a half promise of snow in the air. The plains on the far side of the river were as dim and hopeless as the sky. As he paused at a point where there seemed promise of a shelving bank on either side Ludlow shivered and half turned back toward the impish Kywak.

"What's the use?" he murmured. "Gretchen half refused me once. She will probably wholly refuse me this time."

He stood in silence with one hand on Bismarck's head. Then he straightened himself with a jerk.

"No, old chap!" he exclaimed. "We'll see her again or drown in the attempt. Now, then, I've no way to get my clothes across except to swim in them. I'm not up to the Swiss Family Robinson stunt of carrying them across on my head. I'll leave my overcoat with Kywak. Come on, old faithful!"

He removed his shoes and tied them about his neck by the laces and walked down the bank into the rushing water, then stood still, with the water swirling about his knees. The current was much swifter than he had imagined it would be. However, the river was narrow at this point, so he took a resolute step forward and plunged in above his depth.

After the first shock the cold was not so bad. But the current! The downward swirling movement of the water was almost as powerful as quicksand. The pointed rock Ludlow had chosen for a swimming mark was a dozen rods upstream before he had swam as many strokes. Bismarck was swimming beside him, puffing and blowing like an infant thrashing machine. For a moment Ludlow thought of catching the dog's collar, but decided that they both might go down, though Bismarck could have pulled him across easily in quiet water.

The bitter cold of the water began to strike in, but Ludlow swam on with

quick, strong strokes. Gradually it seemed to him that he was fighting a losing game. The swimming mark was hidden behind a curve in the river. Bismarck had pulled quickly away from him and was now only a short distance from the shore.

Finally, after what seemed hours of swimming, he found himself a rod from the shore, where Bismarck barked at him excitedly. But, to his chagrin, though he dropped his feet several times, he could not touch bottom even at three feet from the bank. And the bank! Up and down the river, as far as he could see, it rose sheer and blank as a tiny canyon, with not a blade of grass nor a crevice for hand or foot hold. How Bismarck had made the leap he could not fathom.

He turned on his back, hoping that the current would hold him against the wall while he felt for a hand hold. But his fingers only slipped over the rough sandstone, while the river carried him rapidly downstream, and Bismarck followed, barking and whining. The weight of his clothes and the cold were by this time rendering him almost helpless.

Ludlow turned on his face and again let his feet drop. To his joy, they found a resting place, and he stood with his shoulders out of water. He rested, panting and fighting off the numbing cold, then again passed his hands up and down the face of the rock for a grip. The surface was hopelessly smooth. The top of the bank was too far above the highest reach of his hands, even with jumping, to grasp. He tried cautiously to walk along the bank, but found that his foothold was a mere outcrop of rock not more than a foot in diameter.

He dropped his bruised, bleeding hands in despair. Bismarck pushed his great head over the edge and whined pitiously, with an eager light in his brown eyes that seemed to say: "Can't you understand? Can't you?"

Ludlow gave a great spring and caught the dog's collar with his right hand. Instantly Bismarck braced his mighty shoulders and pulled back. Inch by inch the man was pulled from the water until he grasped the top of the bank. As he let the dog's collar go Bismarck, frantic with excitement, caught the shoulder of Ludlow's coat in his teeth and, with little growls and whimperings as Ludlow scrambled and pushed, pulled him fairly on to the bank.

There Ludlow lay panting, too weak to pat the dog, who licked his hands and face, wild with joy.

Late that evening the group around the fireplace in the living room of the De la Rio ranch heard a weak rapping at the door, followed by the quick, deep bark of a dog. As Jack opened the door Ludlow staggered in, white faced, hatless, his frozen garments crackling as he moved.

The sudden warmth and light dazed him, and he leaned weakly against the wall, the great dog crouching beside him. The group around the fireplace was speechless with amazement at the familiar figure of Ludlow in his strange plight.

Then Gretchen, who had gone white as her dainty gown, uttered a little plying cry and, giving no heed to spectators, ran across the room.

"Fritz Ludlow!" she cried. "Fritz, what is it? What is the matter?" She threw her arms protectively around his shivering body.

A smile of great sweetness and content came to Ludlow's drawn face. "Nothing is the matter now," he said, and Bismarck pawed his knee, with a jealous whine.

Howie's Mutiny

By JED STRONG

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Howie glanced after Marcia with regret. Here was a splendid cruise spoiled almost at the outset. Just because he had ridiculed her matinee hero she had stamped her foot angrily and had declared that she wanted to be set ashore at the first opportunity, and Marcia was always as good as her word.

While he was still gazing at the companionway down which her slender figure had vanished Mrs. Lorraine came panting up the stairway.

"Mr. Howie," she said majestically, "my daughter informs me that she has been grossly insulted. I must ask that you put the yacht about at once and land us at the nearest port."

Howie made the mistake of trying to argue. "I merely said that Howland Montague was a stick," he began, "and then Marcia grew angry and gave me back my ring and said she wanted to go home."

"I consider Mr. Montague a most admirable actor," announced the lady, who cared nothing for Montague, but who dearly loved a battle. "It was not polite of you to attack the judgment of your guests. Perhaps had it been a horse we should have had to abide your judgment, but of the finer arts you know nothing, and I am glad that my daughter has discovered her error in time to avoid an alliance with a man of such poor taste. Please put about at once."

Howie groaned. Of old he knew Mrs. Lorraine as an antagonist worthy of one's steel. She would persist in upholding Marcia in her bad temper. If they ever reached port with Marcia in this humor he could never hope to restore the engagement. In spite of her temper, or possibly because of it, Howie loved Marcia, and he was determined that at all hazards the yacht would not touch the landing at Palm

Beach until a truce had been effected.

He was still pondering the matter when half an hour later Mrs. Lorraine's portly form reappeared upon the deck. Instead of coming toward him she went to the wheelhouse and presently she bore down upon him, the light of virtuous indignation firing her eyes.

"I perceive that we are still headed northeast," she said as she approached. "I must insist that you turn about immediately."

She was almost sorry that she would not have this tractable young man for a son-in-law, but her joy was short lived, for when the sun set in the east it was plain to be seen that the compass card had been tampered with and there was an explosion that proved more diverting to the rest of the party than to Howie or the Lorraines.

It ended in the yacht's nose being swung around, and, with a pocket compass, Mrs. Lorraine verified the course. The rest were sorry that the trip was to be abandoned; but, full of the joy of victory, Mrs. Lorraine considered no one but herself.

It was barely light the next morning when the sound of pistol shots were heard on the deck, and the party rushed up the companionway. Up forward the crew had gathered and stood, silent faced, regarding the owner and his captain. At the appearance of the party Howie left the sailing master and came toward them.

"It's all right," he explained. "There was a mutiny, and I am afraid that the men have possession of the boat. They have promised not to interfere with our comfort, and they will land us at one of the Bahama group, with enough provisions to enable us to reach Nassau. They will give us the launch."

For a moment Mrs. Lorraine eyed the crew and seemed on the point of going forward to them, but to their great relief she elected to have hysterics instead and caused a diversion that occupied the entire party until the still civil steward announced breakfast.

The situation seemed more pleasant after breakfast. Apart from the fact that every man in the crew carried a revolver, ostentatiously displayed, they went about their work the same as usual. No detail of service was lacking, and Jimmy Trovers declared a mutiny de luxe to be a positively novel and pleasant experience.

Mrs. Lorraine offered the men rapidly increasing sums to put the party ashore at Palm Beach, but the crew declined to approach within reach of the authorities, and even the good lady's threat to have the southern Atlantic squadron ordered in their pursuit the moment they reached a cable station did not move them.

They were stubborn, but polite, and finally even she gave up the endeavor and contented herself with sighing loudly from the depths of a deck chair as she watched Howie pace the deck.

Howie had his hand in a bandage, explaining lightly that he had barely been scratched by a bullet in the fight, and Marcia followed him about the deck with her sympathetic glance, though it was not until evening that she broke the conversational ice.

The full moon was just rising out of the sea as she came toward the spot where he was leaning against the rail. "Does your hand hurt very much?" she asked, trying to make her voice sound cold and polite.

"Not very much," was the indifferent answer. "That is the least of my troubles."

"It is very awkward," she conceded, "to have your boat seized."

"I don't care about the boat," he disclaimed. "They are welcome to the Irene for all I care. She would only serve to remind me of you, and I must put you out of my heart if I can."

"Do you care so much?" she asked wonderingly. "You did not seem to mind yesterday."

"I had some hope yesterday," he declared. "I realize now that there is none."

"Faint heart ne'er won fair lady," she quoted. He grasped her hand.

"Do you mean that, Marcia?" he demanded.

"Perhaps Montague is a little stilted," she conceded. "It is a very silly thing to quarrel over, anyway."

"And you are willing to make up?"

For answer she slipped her hand within his bandaged member. The ring finger shone white and bare in the moonlight. She slipped the ring upon it.

"I was a very silly girl, Fred," she said penitently. "I do not deserve forgiveness."

"We never get our just deserts," he laughed, "and, besides, I should not have poked fun at Montague."

Mrs. Lorraine came up the companionway just in time to see two heads close together. Marcia saw her first.

"It's all right, mother," she laughed. "It was all a mistake."

With a sickening sense of defeat, the elder woman turned and went back to the cabin. With her hand still in his, Howie went forward to the wheelhouse. "It's all right," he said quietly. "Head back for the course."

The man at the wheel touched his cap respectfully and swung the wheel. Marcia started.

"And you have been in command all the time?" she demanded.

"Not exactly," he declared.

"But the mutiny"—she persisted.

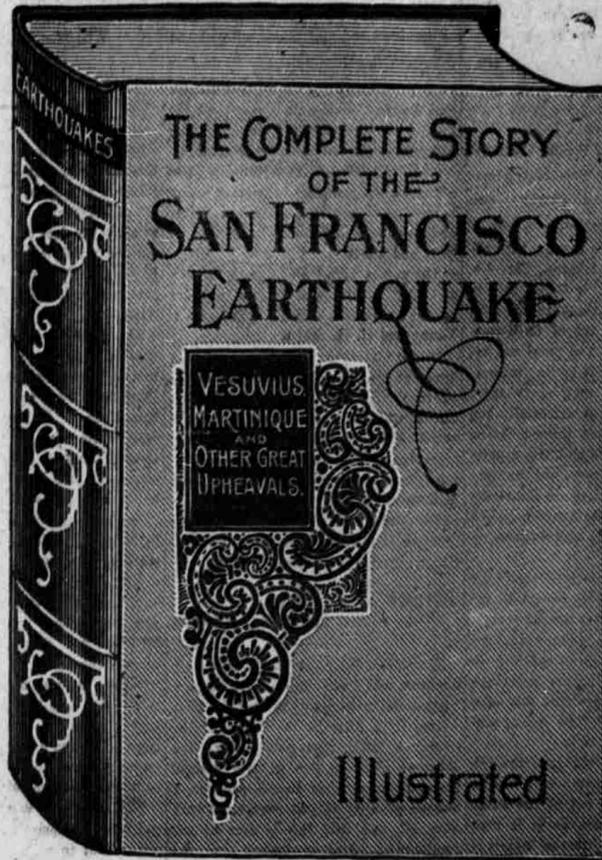
"Made to order," he admitted. "When your mother espoused your cause I could see that nothing less than a mutiny would clear the air. You said yourself 'Faint heart ne'er won fair lady.'"

"Poor mother," sighed Marcia. "I don't think you will make an ideal son-in-law."

"But a good husband," he insisted, "and the head of the house."

"Poor mother," said Marcia again.

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